DISTRO**HOPPER**

We've tapped GCHQ's communications to find out what's going on in distro land.
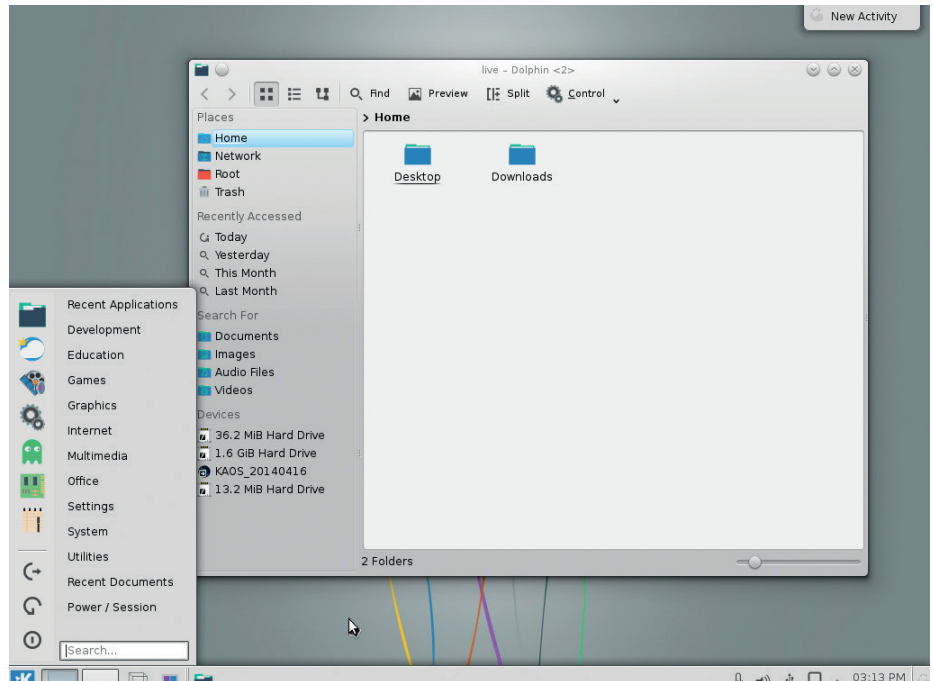
KaOS

A simple and elegant KDE.

KaOS is about providing a simple, clean KDE experience. In order to achieve this, the developers have slimmed the repositories to just over 2,000 packages. This is a minuscule number by most distros' standards, but it provides everything most people will need.

By reducing the amount of software available, KaOS creates a consistent environment containing only what the distro's creators think are the best applications for each task. In some cases it enables you to deviate your environment from pure Qt, so Firefox and LibreOffice are available (though not installed by default).

The KDE interface is quite different from the standard, and the focus seems to be on keeping things simple. The developers have managed to build a unique and slick desktop without getting sucked into the pitfall of adding too many graphical effects – a trap that's all too common on KDE distros. Our only criticism of the user interface is the lack of tooltips on the menu. This may make it a

We can't think of a less appropriate name than KaOS for such a refined KDE experience.

little difficult for new users to get to know the system. It is, however, a minor gripe on an otherwise excellent interface.

Ultimately, we enjoyed experimenting with KaOS, but we would struggle to use it full-time, as there just isn't enough software for us. It's not aimed at us though – it's intended to be a lean distribution, and that's what it is, as well as being probably the best-looking KDE distro we've used.

Deepin

Deepin is more than just a great software centre.

The English-speaking Linux world has been a little slow to cotton on to the fact that Deepin has been a fantastic distro for a few years now (it's Chinese). It was among the first to feature a software centre for finding, reviewing, and installing software. The Deepin Software Centre has always been one of our favourite apps in this area, and the newest version is no exception.

Deepin has its own desktop environment built on web technologies, and it looks great. The best feature for us was the settings menu. This slides out of the left-hand edge

of the screen, a little like the way that Android settings slide down from the top.

The biggest let-down for this reviewer was the Launcher (similar to Gnome's Dash). It spread the application icons out too thinly and made it take too long to find what we were looking for. Additionally, we wouldn't recommend Deepin for lower-powered machines, as the performance is just a little on the slow side.

We really liked the attention to detail in some areas. For example, the home screen of the web browser (Chrome) has a nice

The slide-out settings and browser home page are both great, innovative features.

setup for easily selecting to search in Google or Bing for websites, videos, places, etc.

Deepin deserves more praise than it gets for producing some cracking pieces of software. If it could just sort out that pesky launcher, it would be a top distro.

Makulu

A quirky distro for quirky people.

Makulu comes with a number of different desktops, including the most recent release of Mate. All of them are heavily themed with cartoon-y icons and earthy colours, which give the distro a pleasant, informal feel. Underneath all this, Makulu is built on Debian, so there is of course all the usual underlying Debian software (plus a host of other repositories including the ones from Mint, SolydXK, Opera, Skype, various Google projects, Mate and its own ones). In other words, there's loads of the latest software available.

On launching Makulu, the first thing we noticed was the office suite: Kingsoft. You may not have heard of this, but it's been around for a while (though the Linux version is new. In fact, it's still considered in Alpha). It's not open source, but it is free (no cost) for the basic version. The most noticeable

Makulu means 'chief' in Zulu – a fact that helps explain the distro's styling.

thing about Kingsoft is that it has an interface similar to MS Office's ribbons. This is a little controversial, but it could help newer Windows refugees feel at home. For a Linux user, a far more serious criticism of this office suite (other than the fact that it's closed source) is that it doesn't support ODF files.

The web browser is Chrome, but with a number of extensions to make it a little more friendly. Adblock Plus is probably the most notable of these, but there

are also notifications for most popular social networks.

Makulu isn't as polished as some distros, and its strong personality will put some people off, as will the inclusion of non-free (as in speech) and social media software. However, the developers have made some bold choices, and that's refreshing to see. If you're bored with mainstream distros and looking for something a bit new and fresh, Makulu is worth a look, if only to see what can be done when a development team tries something a little out of the ordinary.

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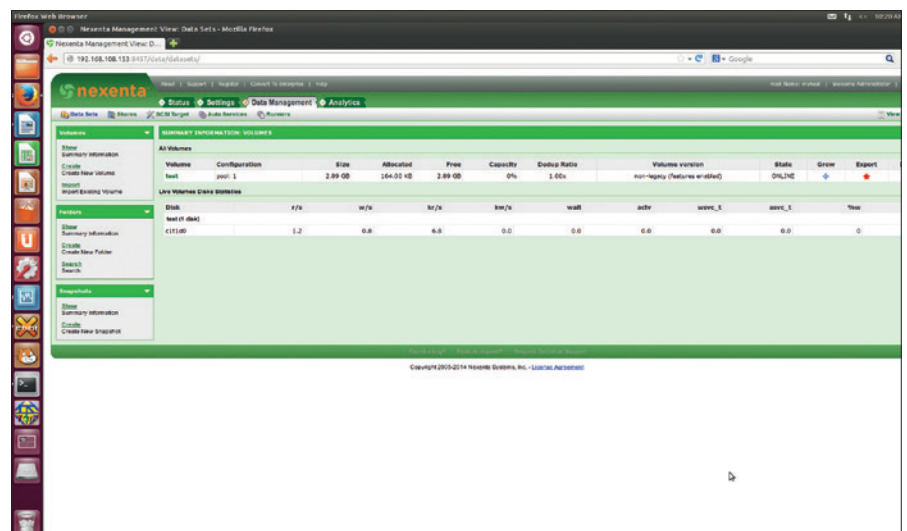

NexentaStor 4.0 Where ZFS feels at home

NexentaStor isn't Linux. It's not even a BSD. It's based on the Illumos kernel, which is derived from Solaris (via OpenSolaris), even further back in the Unix family tree. This is the branch of Unix where ZFS started life. This filesystem is the distro's reason for living. In fact, the heart of NexentaStor is a web interface for managing ZFS data stores.

For this purpose, it's fast and hugely powerful. It's perhaps better suited to managing enterprise storage solutions than setting up a home NAS system, but that doesn't mean that you can't use it for either task.

After freely downloading distros of Linux and BSD, it felt a little weird to have to register for a licence to use NexentaStor. It is free (as in beer) for the community version, but it doesn't feel very FLOSS-y to have to type in a licence code in order to get it to work.

Once you get past this, there's a powerful HTML interface for managing and configuring a mind-boggling array of options that remind you that it's not a plug-and-play system for quickly adding a backup server to your home network, but an enterprise-ready storage system for handling networked computers storing terabytes of information. To this end, it's

Network storage isn't everyone's idea of a good time, but it can be quite an eye opener to see all the options laid out in NexentaStor's absurdly powerful HTML interface.

designed to integrate well with OpenStack, the enterprise cloud platform that all big businesses love these days. If you're interested in learning

about the ZFS filesystem, then using it on its native kernel is a good place to start. Likewise, if you're managing a data centre, it's a useful option.